

STORAGE

FAQ

Q Last month you said you need Roxio Drag-to-Disc or Nero InCD software to packet-write files to rewritable discs. Doesn't Windows XP provide this facility?

A Once you have inserted a blank CD or DVD into your PC, Windows XP allows you to drag and drop files on to the icon for your CD or DVD writer. However, Windows doesn't packet-write them as you do so. Instead, it simply queues up your files, and you then have to click the burn button to write them all to disc.

If you haven't completely filled your disc you can add more data later. This is known as multi-session recording. You can continue to add further sessions until your disc is full, but you can't delete specific files, reuse space or open, alter and save documents on a disc as you can with proper packet writing.

Both Nero and Roxio Easy Media Creator provide multi-session capabilities as well as packet writing.

Alan Lu

PC systems and storage expert

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BUFFALO 300GB DriveStation

★★★★★

£125 inc VAT



Despite its spacious 300GB capacity, Buffalo's silver and white DriveStation is compact enough to fit inside a lunchbox. A switch on the back of the unit sets the DriveStation to turn on and off in sync with your PC, which is a sensible power-saver.

Although Buffalo claims the DriveStation has a 7,200rpm spin speed, we found it disappointingly sluggish. It produced the sort of

performance we would expect from a 5,400rpm portable hard disk.

The backup utility included works as expected but it lacks the ability to schedule more than one automatic backup.

If you need a large hard disk for backing up files, the 300GB DriveStation is an attractive, but slow, choice that costs just 42p per gigabyte.

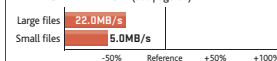
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Auto power function
- ✓ Compact and attractive
- ✗ Sluggish for desktop drive

EXTERNAL HARD DISK 300GB capacity, USB Hi-Speed, external power adaptor
PART CODE HD-HB300U2
SUPPLIER www.morecomputers.co.uk
DETAILS www.buffalo-technology.com

PERFORMANCE (see page 60)



AMACOM Slimline AMA- BYDVRW2-U

★★★

£116 inc VAT



Amacom's small, slim external DVD writer weighs just 365g. It comes with an external power adaptor but no USB-to-5v DC cable, which would enable it to draw power solely from the USB ports. This would have made it more appealing to owners of older laptops.

The bundled software is disappointing, too, consisting of only Nero Express 6 and the ancient WinDVD 4.

The AMA-BYDVRW2-U was slow in our DVD writing tests, particularly in writing to DVD+R DL disks. There's no support for DVD-R DL.

The disappointing performance and external power supply make the AMA-BYDVRW2-U poor value. If you need to write DVDs on the move, it is possible to find USB-powered portable drives that are both faster and more convenient.

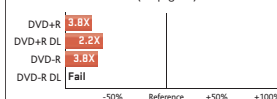
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Light
- ✗ Poor performance
- ✗ Needs external power adaptor

EXTERNAL DVD WRITER 8X DVD+R, 8X DVD-R, 4X DVD+RW, 4X DVD-RW, 2.4X DVD+R DL, 2.4X CD-R, 2.4X CD-RW
PART CODE AMA-BYDVRW2-U
SUPPLIER www.originstorage.com
DETAILS www.amacom-tech.com

PERFORMANCE (see page 60)



Also consider...

WESTERN DIGITAL Passport 80GB

★★★★★

£88 inc VAT

PRICE CUT!



Western Digital's rubber-bottomed Passport is an excellent portable disk. It's a little bigger than a PDA and weighs just 238g, so it's easy to carry around. Inside is a 2½" hard disk that provides 80GB of storage. It connects via USB Hi-Speed and provides the kind of performance usual for such a disk; large files transfer at around 22MB/s and small files at 7MB/s. It's ideal as a second notebook hard disk or as portable file storage.



PORTABLE HARD DISK 80GB capacity, USB Hi-Speed interface, USB powered PART CODE WDXML800UETE SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk DETAILS www.wdc.com Robust portable storage No integrated USB lead FULL REVIEW Aug 2005

SAMSUNG SpinPoint SP2504C

★★★★★

£76 inc VAT

PRICE CUT!



Samsung's SpinPoint SP2504C was the best hard disk in

our Labs test in September 2005. It combines good value with cutting-edge technology. Its 250GB of storage is accessed through a SATA II interface with Native Command Queuing at a maximum transfer rate of 300MB/s. If you're looking for more internal storage and you have a free SATA connector, this is the drive to buy.



INTERNAL HARD DISK 3½" internal hard disk, 250GB capacity, 232GB formatted capacity (NTFS), SATA 300 interface, 7,200rpm spin speed, 8MB cache PART CODE SP2504C SUPPLIER www.scan.co.uk DETAILS www.samsung.com Great performance Slightly more expensive than other 250GB drives FULL REVIEW Sep 2005

PHILIPS 80GB SPD5210CC

★★★★★
£95 inc VAT



Philips' SPD5210CC is an 80GB portable hard disk that's about the size of a diary or personal organiser. The sturdy aluminium case has a rubber-coated outer edge for extra protection, although we wouldn't recommend dropping any hard disk.

A small button activates the included Nero BackItUp software, which automatically synchronises your chosen data between the disk and the PC.

BackItUp allows you to make multiple timed backups, so you have no excuse for losing any data. The interface is a bit cluttered, though.

Performance is what we'd expect from a portable hard disk. The SPD5210CC is good value; it costs only £20 more than the 40GB version, but it's slightly more expensive than Western Digital's Passport (see 'Also consider...' below left).

Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Neat design
- ✓ Excellent value
- ✗ Average small file performance

PORTABLE HARD DISK 80GB capacity, USB Hi-Speed, USB powered
PART CODE SPD5210CC/00
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.consumer.philips.com

PERFORMANCE (see page 60)



PLEXTOR PX-750UF

★★★★★
£93 inc VAT



Plextor's PX-750UF is an external DVD writer that, according to the company, can write to two-layer discs at 8X. Sadly, the firmware upgrade that enables 8X DVD-R DL writing was not available as we went to press. Nevertheless, the PX-750UF should still have been able to write to DVD-R DL discs at 6X, but it was much slower in our tests.

Although the software bundle includes Nero 6 and

Pinnacle Instant CD/DVD, most of the included titles are demo versions, which is disappointing. The PX-750UF has both six- and four-pin FireWire ports. It is a useful drive if you need its varied connection options and DVD-RAM support, but most people will be disappointed with its performance. Samsung's Writemaster SE-W164L (see 'Also consider...' below) is cheaper and faster.

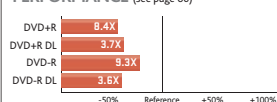
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Lots of connection options
- ✗ Poor performance
- ✗ Poor software bundle

EXTERNAL DVD WRITER 16X DVD+R, 16X DVD-R, 8X DVD+RW, 6X DVD-RW, 8X DVD+R DL, 8X DVD-R DL, 5X DVD-RAM, 40X CD-R, 24X CD-RW
PART CODE PX-750UF/T3BUK
SUPPLIER www.scan.co.uk
DETAILS www.plextor.be

PERFORMANCE (see page 60)



ASUS DRW-1608P2S

★★★★★
£38 inc VAT



Asus's DRW-1608P2S is very fast at

writing two layer DVDs and is one of the few writers we've seen able to burn both DVD-R DL and DVD+R DL at 8X. It didn't do as well writing DVD+RW discs but otherwise held its own in our other tests. DVD-RAM is also supported.

An extensive software bundle consists of Nero Express 6, Ulead DVD MovieFactory and PowerDVD 6. The DRW-1608P2S is a fine choice thanks to a low price, good two-layer performance and a generous software bundle.

INTERNAL DVD WRITER 16X DVD-R, 16X DVD+R, 6X DVD-RW, 8X DVD+RW, 8X DVD-R DL, 8X DVD+R DL, 5X DVD-RAM, 40X CD-R, 32X CD-RW PART CODE DRW-1608P2S
SUPPLIER www.techfever.co.uk DETAILS <http://uk.asus.com>
✓ Fast when writing two-layer discs ✗ Sluggish DVD+RW writing FULL REVIEW May 2006

SAMSUNG Writemaster SE-W164L

★★★★★
£62 inc VAT



The understated silver and black SE-W164L is the cheapest external LightScribe-capable DVD writer we've seen. Apart from our two-layer DVD benchmark, it performed well in our tests. It comes with Nero Express 6 and a space-saving desk stand. Its low price and all-round excellent performance make it a great buy. If you need LightScribe, this is the one to get; if not, it's the icing on what is already a very good cake.



EXTERNAL DVD WRITER 16X DVD-R, 16X DVD+R, 6X DVD-RW, 8X DVD+RW, 4X DVD-R DL, 8X DVD+R DL, 48X CD-R, 32X CD-RW PART CODE SE-W164L SUPPLIER www.pixmania.co.uk DETAILS www.samsungoms-europe.com ✓ Fast when writing to DVD+R ✗ Double-layer performance could be better FULL REVIEW May 2006

CHOOSING AN... External Hard Disk

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

SIZE: Desktop

CAPACITY: 160GB

SPINDLE SPEED: 7,200RPM

INTERFACE: USB Hi-Speed

1 A basic external hard disk with the specs shown above that's designed to sit on your desk costs around £80. For this you'll get a drive that's good for basic backups and enables you to add a second hard disk to your PC without opening up the case. If you're not planning to move the hard disk around often, this is the type of drive you should choose.

2 The higher the drive's capacity, the lower the cost per gigabyte tends to be, giving you more for your money, so buy the biggest disk you can afford. If you're using your external hard disk to back up your internal disk, the general rule is to buy an external disk that has twice the capacity of your internal disk.

3 If you need to transport lots of files around, you need a portable hard disk. Drives that use a compact notebook 2½" hard disk inside are available in capacities up to 120GB. They're small enough to slip into a coat pocket or a bag, but they're more expensive per megabyte than their desktop equivalents.

If you need an even smaller drive, an external hard disk that uses a 1.8" hard disk (as used in iPods) is a good bet. These drives provide a maximum capacity of 60GB. Finally, products that use a microdrive will provide capacities of up to 6GB in a device that's little bigger than a USB flash drive. However, you'll probably end up paying flash drive prices, too.

4 Performance can be a major issue with portable drives. If you're writing a lot of data to and from a disk, choose the one with the highest spin speed. The higher the rpm, the quicker you can copy files to and from your hard disk.

5 USB Hi-Speed is the most common interface on external hard disks. While it's fast enough for most uses, if you deal regularly with very large files, such as DV movies, a faster FireWire 400 hard disk is better. FireWire 800 is even speedier, but few hard disks or PCs have FireWire 800 ports. eSATA hard disks are faster still but are more expensive and harder to find than FireWire 800 disks.